

Funding for Levee Systems, Maintaining Waterways, Transportation Projects, and the Shrimp and Oyster Industries

February 26, 2009

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon (LA-03) announced today that he secured \$53,477,250 for projects in Louisiana's Third Congressional District in the FY 2009 appropriations bills. This includes \$48,677,250 in the FY09 Omnibus Appropriations Act (H.R. 1105) and \$4,800,000 in the FY09 Defense Appropriations Act (H.R. 2638). The Omnibus passed the House last night with bipartisan support and should be considered by the Senate for approval in the next week. The Defense bill passed Congress last September.

"From St. Bernard to Iberia Parish and all the way south to Port Fourchon, projects important to the people of the Third Congressional District are getting well-deserved federal support through this bill," said Rep. Melancon. "Member appropriations like these allow Louisianians to bypass agency bureaucrats in Washington and go directly to their elected representatives to secure federal funding for important projects in their communities."

"The \$53 million in federal dollars going to south Louisiana this year will support a wide range of important priorities in our state. This funding will help build and upgrade levee systems, maintain and improve waterways and roads, fight serious diseases like cancer, and bolster south Louisiana industries like shrimping, sugarcane production, and alligator farming -- all unique and vital parts of our economy. The Louisiana delegation has worked together to fund these important needs, and we will continue to team up to support our state and protect its future."

Rep. Melancon worked to secure the following funding in the FY09 Omnibus Appropriations bill for projects in south Louisiana:

Water Projects

\$14,850,000 for continuation of levee improvements in the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway. The Atchafalaya Basin project is a component of the comprehensive Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) plan consisting of a leveed floodway about 15 miles wide and 110 miles long that extends from Old River, LA, to the Gulf of Mexico. The principal role of the Atchafalaya Basin floodway is to convey one-half of the MR&T floodwaters safely to the Gulf of Mexico. The project contains 449 miles of levees, of which 416 miles are completed to grade and section. Continuing construction of levee improvements is critical to protect the lives of thousands of people and critical hurricane evacuation infrastructure. This is a standard appropriation renewed annually to maintain the levee system.

\$8,619,000 to maintain locks on Bayous Bouef and Sorrel, maintain pumping stations on the Atchafalaya River, and dredge Berwick Harbor. This appropriation is for maintenance of the lock systems on Bayou Bouef and Bayou Sorrel. The funding will also be

used to maintain the pumping stations that are part of the flood protection system on the Atchafalaya River and to dredge Berwick Harbor.

\$8,347,000 for dredging the navigation channel on the Atchafalaya River & Bayous Chene, Boeuf, and Black. This appropriation will be used to dredge and maintain the navigation channel. The channel in the Atchafalaya River is critical to the Port of Morgan City. The river system provides export access for the area's offshore oil and gas products and import access for raw materials. The channel is authorized at a 20' depth but "fluff" remains a problem at the mouth of the river. The Corps is performing an advanced jetty engineering project there speeding up water flow, allowing the river to "self-scour."

\$5,748,000 for Morganza to the Gulf Hurricane and Storm Protection System. The Morganza to the Gulf of Mexico Hurricane and Storm Protection System is a 64-mile system of levees, locks and floodgates that, when complete, will provide hurricane and flood protection to about 120,000 people and 1,700 square miles in Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes that currently have no hurricane protection. This appropriation is broadly designated for the investigations phase of the project, but could be used for the planning, engineering and design of the lock on the Houma Navigation Canal, which is the highest priority component in the hurricane protection project.

\$2,025,000 to convert flood-prone lands in the Lower Atchafalaya Floodway into public recreation areas. This funding is part of an ongoing flood control project by the Corps of Engineers to acquire real estate, excluding minerals, in the Lower Atchafalaya Floodway for flood control purposes, environmental protection purposes, developmental control purposes, and public access. The project will convert these flood-prone lands into public recreation areas, including construction of several campgrounds, boat launching ramps, a visitor's center, other recreational facilities and initial construction of two pilot water management units, including construction of miscellaneous canal closures and water circulation improvements.

\$1,158,000 for maintenance and dredging of Houma Navigational Canal. This funding will be used to maintain and dredge the channel. Dredge material may be used in a beneficial manner to create marsh in open water areas adjacent to the Houma Navigation Canal.

\$957,000 to upgrade the Larose to Golden Meadow Levee System. The Water Resources Development Act of 2007 authorized the Larose to Golden Meadow levee system to be constructed to 100-year protection levels. This appropriation will go toward upgrading this ring levee system.

\$478,000 for channel deepening at the Port of Iberia. This appropriation will fund the planning, engineering and design phase of the Port of Iberia project, also known as the Acadiana Gulf of Mexico Access Channel (AGMAC). This project will provide deeper channel access to the Gulf of Mexico so that marine fabricators at the port can transport larger rigs supporting the offshore oil and gas industry from the port to the Gulf.

Transportation & Infrastructure Projects

\$1,021,250 for Louisiana Highway 1 Improvement Project. This appropriation will be applied toward the next phase of the La. 1 Improvement Project, replacing the Leeville Bridge. This project will relieve congestion and delays associated with repairs to and maintenance of the Leeville Lift- Bridge. Replacing the bridge will facilitate hurricane evacuation, improve emergency response time, improve safety, support the growing economic potential of the area resulting from increased tourism, and support increased offshore drilling operations.

The La. 1 improvement project extends from Louisiana Highway 3235 west of Golden Meadow to Louisiana Highway 3090 at its intersection with La. 1, north of Port Fourchon. Rep. Melancon has worked in Congress to secure over \$126.5 million in federal funding and loans for the La. 1 improvement project, which will eventually elevate the highway from Golden Meadow to Fourchon and protect it from flooding. In 2005, Rep. Melancon worked to secure \$60 million for the project through the highway funding authorization bill (SAFETEA LU, H.R. 3). The La. 1 project also received a \$60 million loan in 2005 from the federal TIFIA program, after Rep. Melancon urged U.S. Transportation Secretary Norm Mineta to approve the large loan because of the highway's regional and national significance as the sole evacuation route and access road to Port Fourchon and the LOOP. The project has also received over \$1.7 million through the Coastal Impact Assistance Program, which Rep. Melancon helped establish with the Energy Policy Act of 2005. Rep. Melancon has obtained over \$4.8 million for La. 1 through the annual transportation appropriations process, including the FY09 Omnibus Appropriations Bill.

\$400,000 for storm water system improvements in Golden Meadow. This appropriation will continue funding of the Jefferson Street Drainage Improvement Project in Golden Meadow. This is part of the town's multi-phase project, begun in the 1980s, to replace the collection of septic tanks, cesspools and individual sewer plants with a community sewerage system. Specifically, this appropriation is for phase 3 of the project, installing a gravity sewer collection system that will flow to a pump station. The project will greatly reduce the flooding of 128 residences, three schools, and two highways (La. 1 and La. 3235) in the town. All of the preliminary engineering work is complete.

Wetlands Restoration and Environment

\$400,000 to continue a study to improve the health of the Mississippi River, coastal wetlands, and the Gulf of Mexico. The Long Term Estuary Assessments Group brings researchers from Tulane, Xavier, Nicholls State, and the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium (LUMCON) together to work toward understanding and improving the environmental health of the lower Mississippi River, coastal wetlands, and Gulf of Mexico. This appropriation will support LEAG's efforts to continue and expand their five-year sediment transport study. This study is critical to understanding how, how much, and what type of sediment flows in the Mississippi River and what this means for coastal restoration. In addition, LEAG biosensors and platforms will ultimately be incorporated with the USGS national monitoring network with the potential to revolutionize health monitoring for coliform bacteria and other contaminants of concern.

Agriculture and Fisheries

\$2,505,000 for construction of facilities at the Sugarcane Research Lab near Houma (Terrebonne Parish). This appropriation will provide continued funding for the construction of replacement greenhouses and headhouse (plant-preparation) areas at the USDA's Agriculture Research Service's Sugarcane Research Laboratory's farm near Houma, LA. The current ARS research facilities lack the appropriate engineering controls to ensure robust plant growth and a safe and secure work environment for ARS employees and their collaborators.

\$200,000 for technology to help shrimp vessels in the Gulf comply with federal overfishing regulations and avoid shrimp fishery closures. In January 2008, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued a final rule implementing new mandates under the Magnuson-Stevens Act to end overfishing and rebuild the red snapper stock in the Gulf of Mexico. A primary component of this plan is a substantial reduction in the bycatch of juvenile red snapper in the shrimp fishery. This reduction is achieved through a large reduction in shrimp fishing in juvenile red snapper habitat areas. Failure to achieve the necessary reduction in shrimp fishing effort triggers a closure of the shrimp fishery in the red snapper habitat. The ability to accurately measure where and when shrimp fishing occurs each year is not only critical to achieving statutory red snapper conservation objectives, it is absolutely crucial to the future survival of the Gulf shrimp fishery.

The principal tool to measure where and when shrimp fishing occurs each year is the new Electronic Logbook (ELB) technology developed under this program. To date, under this program approximately 400 offshore shrimp vessels have been equipped with ELBs, and the data generated has provided the scientific basis of the new red snapper bycatch management plan. With this new plan now fully implemented in federal regulations, continued funding to expand this technology to the entire active shrimp fleet (about 1200 vessels) is needed. This appropriation will allow the NMFS to allocate grants to more shrimp vessels for the procurement of ELBs.

\$174,000 to help the Gulf Coast oyster industry reach out to consumers. This appropriation will help the oyster industry continue an education outreach program to at-risk consumers of raw oysters about the risk of eating raw oysters during certain times of the year and introducing them to post-harvest processed oysters that can be consumed with less risk. The education program is part of the *Vibrio vulnificus* Management Plan (VMP) adopted in 2001 by a consortium of federal and state regulatory agencies and the shellfish industry known as the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC). The plan required the Gulf States to reduce *Vibrio vulnificus* (V.v.) illnesses by 40%, collectively, by the end of 2006 and 60% collectively, by the end of 2008. The Gulf States met the 40% illness reduction goal in 2006, but may not meet the 60% illness reduction goal at the end of this year. If these illness reduction goals are not met by the end of 2008, the Gulf Coast oyster community could be required from May through September of each year to post harvest process all oysters that are sold for raw consumption, shuck all oysters harvested and label for cooking only, or close oyster harvesting areas.

\$69,000 for West Nile disease prevention (Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries). Several infectious diseases, including West Nile Virus, and parasites have been identified as killing farmed alligators. This appropriation will continue clinical research for West Nile Virus disease prevention and evaluate disease risks associated with the release of potentially infected farm-raised alligators into the wild alligator population. Alligator farming is a \$60 million industry in Louisiana.

Health

\$1,426,000 for cancer prevention research and studies on preventing health consequences from mold following floods and natural disasters. Understanding the role of the diet and dietary supplementation in health maintenance and disease prevention is vital to determining how the agricultural industry can provide natural products that create these benefits. Research by Tulane University, Xavier University and the University of Toledo has shown that soy-rich diets are associated with decreased incidence of breast cancer. However, extensive studies on their long-term benefits and side effects of phytoestrogens and isoflavones found in soy products were lacking prior to the seven-year research partnership between the Tulane, Xavier and the USDA Southern Regional Research Center. This collaborative research will study the effects of soy and soy products on health and establish best practices for optimizing benefits and reducing potential health risks of these materials when used by the public. In the coming year, this research will advance to include the study of the design of new drugs originating from natural products like soy.

The second component examines the detrimental effects on human health resulting from exposure to other natural products such as molds. As a result of Hurricane Katrina, southeastern Louisiana has been inundated with a variety of molds found not only in homes but also as part of the natural environment and agricultural regions. Research in this area will examine models for combating the health consequences of molds following floods and other natural disasters.

Law Enforcement

\$300,000 for St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parish Sheriff's Departments. St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parish Sheriff's Departments were hit hard by Hurricane Katrina. St. Bernard's Department suffered a total loss of all equipment and offices. The Sheriff acts as the only law enforcement body in the Parish as well as tax collector. Since the tax base for the Parish has also been decimated, current tax revenues will not sustain operations of the Sheriff's office. This funding will assist the St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parish Sheriff's Departments in maintaining current levels of staffing, for a short period of time, until their tax bases have been restored.

Defense

In addition to the appropriations in the Omnibus bill, Rep. Melancon worked to secure additional funding for south Louisiana in the FY09 Defense Appropriations Bill passed by Congress last September.

\$1,600,000 for the advanced lighting system to help crew rapidly escape from damaged aircraft. This program uses the Advanced Helicopter Emergency Egress Lighting System (ADHEELS) to illuminate the hatches, actuation handles, and now the overhead as well, to an intensity that is visible in underwater conditions, which allows trapped crew to find their way out of the rapidly sinking aircraft. The same escape path lighting is actuated for a land crash, assisting the crew in rapid escape from the aircraft. This system is superior in performance, reliability, and logistics support to the 1970's system it replaces. Using more advanced technology, ADHEELS represents a significant improvement in installation, operation, maintenance, performance and reliability at a lower cost.

\$1,200,000 Department of Defense Brain Injury Rescue and Rehabilitation Project (LSU Health Sciences Center). Traumatic brain injuries (TBI), caused by both trauma and lack of oxygen to the brain, are becoming more common in modern warfare. The Brain Injury Rescue & Rehabilitation (BIRR) program would compile the clinical experiences of hundreds of physicians who have treated thousands of traumatic brain injured (TBI) patients with Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT). High levels of oxygen stimulate the repair and growth of new tissue in wounds, including brain injuries. Most of these patients have recovered of brain functions and many have been able to return to more normal, productive lives. HBOT was developed by the Navy/ Air Force for treating the bends and oxygen-deprivation/reperfusion injuries.

While HBOT's efficacy has been clinically established, it has not become standard of care. The BIRR program funded by this appropriation is a translational scientific study that will combine known basic science and physicians' clinical experiences to produce results that can be immediately applied to our nation's brain injured war casualties and civilian patients.

LSU Health Sciences Center in New Orleans is the only medical school in the nation with co-located and integrated hyperbaric medicine and emergency medicine physician training. They have thus learned to use hyperbaric medicine and emergency medicine together, which is directly applicable to our casualties from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Dr. Paul Harch of LSUHSC has pioneered this work in HBOT and has treated more than 600 patients and has taught the therapy to hundreds of other physicians.

\$2,000,000 SHERPA Interoperable Deployable Communications System for Louisiana Army National Guard. The SHERPA Interoperable Deployable Communications System (IDCS) is a communications system that provides a lightweight, flexible, integrated solution to meet emergency needs during disaster recovery, emergency management, continuity of operations, and rapid infrastructure requirements. The SHERPA Network Core is a single integrated appliance, ruggedized to stand tough environments, supports both satellite and available terrestrial connectivity, modular system design that is interoperable with other standards-based systems.

This system will allow the Louisiana Army National Guard (LAARNG) to meet their mobile communications needs, especially when responding to disaster. It will provide support to command and control elements of the LAARNG during response events. SHERPA (IDCS)

requires minimal LAARNG training and provides interoperable communications that can be quickly deployed to any Louisiana disaster area.

Homeland Security

Additionally, Rep. Melancon worked to include a provision in the FY09 Homeland Security Appropriations Bill (also passed in September) to streamline FEMA's public assistance program and reduce the penalties Katrina and Rita-damaged facilities pay for being under-insured prior to the 2005 storms. Previously, police, fire or criminal justice facilities damaged by Katrina or Rita would need to wait until after their rebuilding project is completed before being reimbursed by FEMA. This provision allows FEMA to pay one lump sum for the cost of repairing or replacing a building when the project is approved. The provision also includes an amendment to increase the amount of grant money Katrina and Rita-damaged facilities can receive. The Stafford Act requires FEMA to reduce the amount of grant money if the building being rebuilt was under-insured through the National Flood Insurance Program. This provision allows FEMA to take only one reduction per facility (i.e., a school campus) instead of a reduction for each individual building on the campus. This exception is only for Katrina and Rita-damaged facilities.

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